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VIM: A POEM

BY

Rev. George Field Hunting.



V I M :

A POEM READ BEFORE

THE DELTA PSI FRATERNITY

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

AT THEIR

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BY

Rev. GEORGE FIELD HUNTING.

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There's a little word in the Latin tongue
Which is big with meaning : said or sung,
It strikes the ear like the ringing note
Which leaps from the bugle's brazen throat.
Spirit and matter, sense and soul,
So strangely mixed in this human whole,
Answer the summons with eager thrill,
To do the work of the master, Will.
Force of muscle and force of mind,
The thinking sage and the toiling hind,
For the task before them, newly gird
Their weary loins at the magic word.
To lift the veil from the secrets deep
The blind arcana of science keep,
Or to tear a foeman limb from limb,
This is the word, and we call it *Vim*.
'Tis a little word, but wondrous strong ;
And its vital power, for right or wrong,
To shake the world, till the world obey,
Shall be the theme of my song to-day.

Within this busy hive we call the world,
There be too many drones and parasites,
Too many idle dreamers, hangers-on
Upon the skirts of industry. When night,

The well-earned purchase of a day of toil,
 Bids weary nature lay her garments by
 To rest a while, then mayhap one may dream
 In innocence ; not so the sluggish shirk
 Who at high noon lingers behind to drowse,
 While better men, beneath the sultry sun,
 Fill all the golden hours with honest work.
 To sleep at midday ! in a world like this,
 A world so full of want and woe and sin :
 To dally in the lazy lap of ease,
 When every passing zephyr is a sigh,
 And the great throbbing heart of human life
 Cries out for help.—this is a crime most base :
 'Tis foulest treason, rank disloyalty
 To Him who is supreme and well hath said
 To every creature, 'Work, for 'tis my will.'
 Is there not room enough, within the bounds
 Of this far-reaching law, for freest choice
 Of labor ? None are bound to rake the slums
 For shreds of linen, no decree compels,
 But vulgar taste or arbitrary choice
 Selects the ragman's hook and sack. The field
 Is open, rich and ample : he who will,
 May cull, and where he will, and worthy toil
 For worthy ends will reap its sure reward.
 What mean ye then, O idlers ! that ye eat
 The hard-earned bread of diligence, and feed,
 As feeds the vampire, on the sap and life
 Of weary workers ? And ye malcontents !

What mean ye that ye bicker at your lot,
 And like a caged bird peek at the bars
 Which, while they bind, protect? Work! 'tis the law
 The universe obeys. Naught hath He made
 Who made us all, but hath its proper share
 In that well ordered plan wherein no place
 Is found for indolence. A life of sloth
 Is selfishness, and selfishness is sin :
 It is a fungus on the comely form
 Of our humanity ; a morbid growth,
 Which mars its symmetry, and blights the bloom
 Upon the cheek of beauty. So thy voice,
 Thou peevish, sour complainer, is a jar
 In nature's harmony, a dismal note
 Of doleful discord in the psalm of life.

'Nay', sighs the sluggard, 'but 'tis man alone
 This law unequal binds to dreary toil.
 All else is free, free to disport itself,
 And frolic all its merry life away,
 On the broad common of the universe.'

'Twas only yesterday I chanced to hear
 This idler singing by the river side,
 And thus he sang :—'I'd sooner dream than work,
 For blust'ring March has blown itself away,
 And God has sent me such an April day
 As it would seem God never sent before.
 The cool west wind, just tempered of its chill,
 Is sporting with the oak leaves, brown and gold.

They died in Autumn, but they fondly cling
 Till budding newness bids the old give place,
 Then drop away, e'en as the cherished grace
 And comeliness of some fair vanished face,
 Drop out of mind, displaced by newer thoughts.
 The wild Wisconsin from its thousand springs
 Among the pines, swift through the ragged gorge
 Comes leaping down ; upon the foaming flood.
 One lonely leaflet, parted from the stem,
 Falls noiseless, and unmissed goes drifting by.
 Even as some tired soul casts off the line
 Which binds it to life's shore, and floats away.
 The romping eddies linger by the way
 To sport beneath the shadow of the shore.
 To swing and waltz a happy hour away
 In careless glee. The old grey bearded cliff
 Stoops wooing o'er them, fain to catch and kiss
 The saucy, whirling hoydens as they pass.
 The ripples rollic with an eager zest,
 And play at hide and seek among the rocks.
 I hear their mellow voices from the caves
 As each his fleeing comrade swift pursues
 Along the low, dim-lighted corridors,
 And then comes laughing back to lie at rest
 Among the pebbles on the farther shore.
 The chipper squirrel chatters his delight
 Among the oaks, and from the burrowed banks
 The swallows twitter welcome to the sun.
 The timid partridge, hid among the pines,
 Beats his lone monotone : a pigeon coos :

And through the tree-tops comes a sudden whir,
 And all the leafy shore is peopled now
 With purple flocks ; a cautious, grizzled head
 Peeps out inquiring from the badger's den,
 And living things are listening everywhere
 To hear the wooded slopes and grassy dells
 Give back the echoes of a glad good-bye
 To Winter. Joy is here, and happy ease.
 No statute limits this true liberty ;
 But stream and leaflet, bird and beast, obey
 One law alone, and that their own free will.
 Would such a life were mine ! but I must toil,
 Condemned, through life's long, weary pilgrimage,
 To tug and strain and struggle for my bread,
 While all that is beside may pluck its fill
 Of dainties rare, made ready for its hand.

Thou fool ! Dost thou not fear to mock thy God
 With such a plaint ? Turn thee and look again,
 And thou shalt find in these which form thy plea
 For idleness, a better plea for work.
 The welcome sun, whose gladsome, golden glow
 Lights up thy day : the pearly drops of rain,
 Dotting with dimples all the river's breast ;
 The breeze you deem but toying with the leaves,
 These all are workers, at the beck and nod
 Of Him who builded earth for thine abode.
 And bade it bud and blossom for thy sake.
 Each ruddy ray, and every pattering drop,

And cooling breath of heaven which fans thy brow,
 Are toilers all, swift couriers of grace,
 To do the will of Him whose name is Love.
 From the far blue beyond, on eager wing,
 These messengers of God vie each with each,
 To bless the earth's broad acres, barren else,
 With corn and wine. These fill man's grosser want,
 While hills o'erspread with green, mottled and flecked
 With gold, and tawny grim old rocks festooned
 With dainty tufts of emerald, scarlet-tipped,
 Delight the eye, and feed the finer taste.
 See and confess thy fault, ungrateful man!
 For, warp and woof, this goodly tapestry
 Beneath thy feet, fresh from the looms of God,
 Was wrought in secret by the willing hands
 Of these, His journeymen. Sunshine and shower
 And breeze combined their skill to weave for thee
 This fabric fair, thy idle feet defile.
 Nor these alone rebuke thee : from the hills
 A thousand voices trill a roundelay,
 And every singer of the thousand sings
 The song of labor. In the arching elm,
 And hid away among the fronds of pine,
 And in the breezy maple tops, in pairs,
 The busy builders weave with wondrous skill
 Their summer home. No idlers linger here,
 No sad complainers hinder their employ,
 But each, as God hath taught, works with a will,
 And rests him, weary, with a song of praise.

But hark ! amid these voices of the grove,
 There is a sound of sterner toil than theirs.
 The rolling river, eager for the sea,
 Roars round the rocks, and 'gainst the rugged shore
 The fretting current, hindered of its will,
 Raves like a caged beast ; it snarls and spits,
 And grates its foaming fangs against the cliff,
 Till fruitless fury wears itself away ;
 And baffled rage, in sullen silent wrath.
 Glides glaring backward, gnashing, to its den,
 To feed its frenzy for a fiercer fight.
 So through the years, with grim, persistent hate.
 The struggling stream has gnawed the barrier through,
 And tireless still, it widens out the breach.
 Dim caves, and cloistered caverns deep and dark,
 Column and arch, and lofty pillared dome,
 Clean cut into the cliff, attest the power
 Of willful work ; and man, so proud of man.
 Listens, and looks, and wonders, and is dumb.
 These, dreamer, are disjointed parts and bits
 Of that huge enginery which moves or stays,
 As God doth touch the lever. Thou alone,
 Of all His wondrous works the head and chief,

 Darest to complain, or disobey His law.
 Many there be, O friends, who dream and sing
 Their life away upon the river banks,
 And few there be that work. The power is theirs,
 But 'tis a slumbering power, a power unused.
 The giant, though he sleep, is yet no whit

The less a giant : the broad-chested brawn
 Which plucked the lordly lion by the beard,
 And bore away old Gaza's ponderous gate.
 Was all the while the same resistless force ;
 'Twas Sampson still, though in Delilah's lap.

The idle steamer at the quay,
 May be as staunch as sails the sea :
 Her bolts of copper, ribs of oak.
 As strong as ever dared the stroke
 Of wild Atlantic's foaming wrath.
 Or through the ice-field forced a path.
 Her mighty engines scorn the strain
 Of aught that ever swept the main.
 From keel to topmast, fore and aft,
 She's taut and trim, a gallant craft,
 But useless : just a helpless hulk,
 Cumbering the harbor with her bulk ;
 An idle loungee in the stream.
 And all for lack of fire and steam.
 So, Brothers, many men there be,
 Right nobly fitted for life's sea,
 With might of muscle, brain and soul,
 Combined in one compacted whole ;
 Who never leave the harbor's shoal,
 Nor drift beyond the quiet mole ;
 For staunch and strong, and taut and trim,
 They're worthless, just for want of *Vim*.

And what is *Vim* ? 'Tis that in man
 Which makes him do the best he can ;
 It touches all life's hidden springs,
 And lifts the soul toward nobler things :
 'Tis it inspires the earthy clod
 To seek some kinship with its God.
 'Tis it, alas ! our common foe
 Debases to his work of woe.
 This is the gift God gave to man,
 To be a blessing or a ban,
 As he shall choose, whose own free will
 May use the gift, for good or ill.

The powers of darkness, to their master leal.
 Bring to their labor an absorbing zeal.
 Each plotting demon, with a hearty zest,
 Works with a will, and wills his very best.
 No scheme of mischief emanates from hell,
 But hands are found to execute it well.
 The broadest, deepest lines on history's page
 Are bloody traces of relentless rage.
 And every record of the Church or State
 Is scarred and marred by some consuming hate.
 Through all the centuries, since time began,
 Whatever man has done to ruin man,
 Owes all its sad success, and triumph grim,
 To weapons wielded by *envenomed vim*.

If, then, these base, ignoble deeds demand
 An earnest purpose and a willing hand,

What soul-compelling force and tireless zeal
 Should nerve his manhood who for manhood's weal
 Dares and endures and wrestles in the fight,
 To win the world and hold it for the right.
 No childish play, nor showy dress parade.
 No idle boast, nor pompous gasconade,
 Can e'er dislodge the stalwart, stubborn throng,
 Who lie intrenched behind the works of wrong.
 Time was, when castle wall and turret gray
 Fell to the earth before the trumpet's bray.
 Not so to-day, for He whose right to choose
 None may dispute, hath chosen, and will use
 The best of human strength and human skill,
 To work for earth the wonders of His will.
 Up, then, my comrades ! up, ye gallant few !
 Whose ringing watchword is the Good and True :
 Ye who are brave to bear the battle's brunt,
 Wheel into line, and forward to the front.

But hark ! the while your eager troops deploy,
 A veteran bugler in the king's employ,
 Unmindful of that monument of salt
 On Sodom's plain, looks back and sounds a halt ;
 His name Conservative ; a noble name,
 And nobly has he borne the oriflamme
 Of stable truth through all the ages past ;
 But, worthy comrade ! 'tis a fatal blast
 Which stays the ardor of these men of might,
 As over-zealous in the cause of Right.

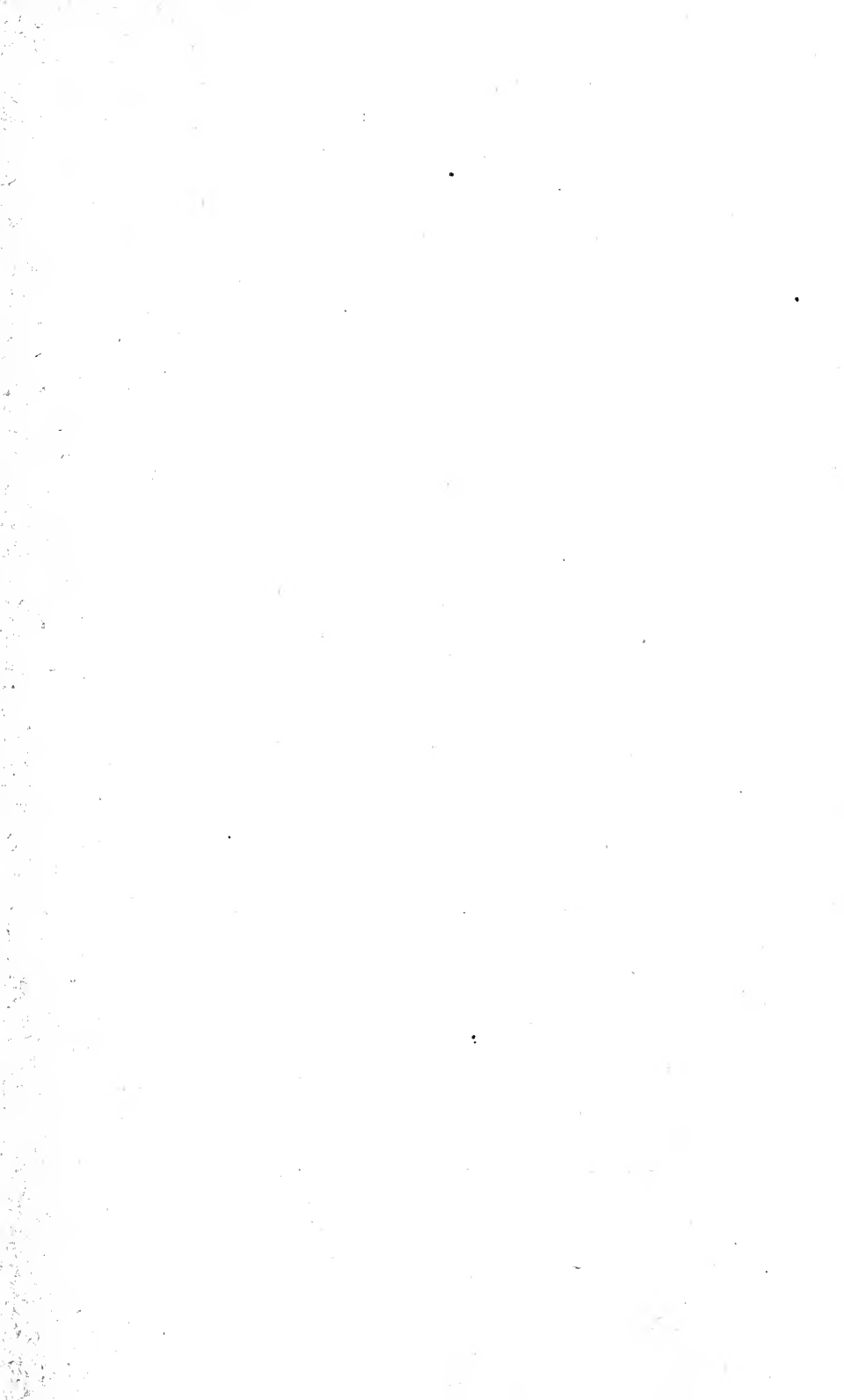
They seek not to o'erturn the old and true,
 But love the old, and will defend it too.
 Their hearts have naught of sympathy with creed
 Which overlooks a fallen creature's need,
 Or, to man's utter and eternal ruth,
 With daring hand emasculates the truth.
 'Tis only this, my comrade, they would do.
 Meantime, as jealous for the truth as you,
 They would infuse fresh blood into the veins
 Of hoary age, that to these battle plains
 The old-time vigor of your storied song
 May be restored, to cope with modern wrong.
 Give them your hand and heart, my honored sire !
 Warmed and inspired with old Promethean fire,
 And to their lusty loins add zeal and zest
 With your 'God speed, my sons ! go do your best.'

O brother workers in the cause of right !
 The foe is arming for the final fight ;
 His mocking champions swagger in their pride,
 As who of old the Hebrew tribes defied.
 But somewhere in His host, our God hath had,
 In ev'ry age, His chosen shepherd lad ;
 Nor will he fail us in this latter day ;
 But somewhere in his kingdom, hid away,
 Perchance, among these green hills of the north,
 A leader waits, till God shall call him forth.
 The staff and sling lie in some quiet nook,
 The five smooth stones are by some babbling brook,

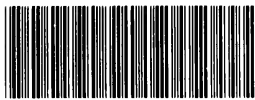
And in His own good time, the God we trust,
Will lay the haughty braggart in the dust.

But shall we idly wait, and dream away
The precious hours, till that expected day?
Or will we give our toil for paltry pelf?
Nay ! for whom heaven will help, must help himself.
E'en though our leader, Brothers, be but Saul,
'Tis ours, equipped, to join him, one and all,
That when the giant falls 'neath heaven's wrath,
We may pursue his minions back to Gath.

Up, then, my Comrades ! gird your loins anew ;
Raise high the standard of the good and true ;
Lift to His praise your ringing battle-hymn,
And give to God a *consecrated Vim*.



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